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PROGRESS REPORT ON FOLLOW-UP TO ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL RESOLUTIONS 1995/56 AND 1996/33

Strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations

SUMMARY

The present report responds to Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/33 of 22 July 1996 on strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations which "urges the governing bodies of the relevant agencies to complete their consideration of the follow-up to Council resolution 1995/56 [of 28 July 1995] no later than their first regular sessions of 1997". The report is cross-referenced with the report on "Children and women in emergencies: strategic priorities and operational concerns for UNICEF" (E/ICEF/1997/7), which touches on a number of relevant issues considered in relation to Council resolutions 1995/56 and 1996/33.

This report, as well as comments by delegations and any Board decision, will be transmitted to the Secretary-General for inclusion in his report on this subject to the Council at its substantive session of 1997.

* E/ICEF/1997/2.

INTRODUCTION

1. The indicative agenda of issues for consideration within the framework of Economic and Social Council resolution 1995/56 of 28 July 1995 (ref. E/1995/L.45, annex) covers three broad sets of concerns which form the basis for the present report:

(a) Agency roles and operational responsibilities with regard to prevention, preparedness, humanitarian response, rehabilitation, recovery and development, as applicable, in both countries of origin and countries of asylum. An agency's role and responsibilities determine its approach to strengthening local capacity and coping mechanisms and govern its allocation of resources between life-saving needs, prevention, preparedness and recovery;

(b) Inter-agency coordination, comprising the practical implications for each agency of full participation in programming coordinated by the United Nations Department of Humanitarian Affairs (DHA) and in related consolidated appeals, and addressing the development of operative memoranda of understanding (MOUs) between organizations. In addition, the Inter-Agency Task Force is examining the issue of a common system to monitor and document humanitarian programmes as one means of contributing to increased accountability of agencies;

(c) Agency-specific internal systems, efficiency and capacities, including the operational and financial capacity to act in a timely and effective manner, administrative and other procedures which provide flexibility and facilitate rapid response, strategies for comprehensive staff development (including inter-agency training models) and the extent of delegation of authority to the field level.

2. Inter-agency follow-up to the Economic and Social Council resolution is being pursued through the Inter-Agency Task Force and its related working groups coordinated by DHA and in which UNICEF participates. In addition, UNICEF is undertaking a number of policy and operational reviews, as part of its own management reform process, which are relevant to the present discussion.

I. UNICEF ROLE AND OPERATIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

3. UNICEF is the agency of the United Nations system mandated to advocate and act for children. As a humanitarian actor, its function is to ensure that the needs and rights of the child are always given priority on the humanitarian agenda and are analysed in a systematic and comprehensive manner. No other agency has this specific responsibility. Thus, it complements the mandates of sector-oriented partners such as the World Health Organization, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the World Food Programme (WFP).

4. The foundation for UNICEF action is its long-term country programme approach and its developmental orientation in addressing the determinants of the well-being or vulnerability of children and women in crisis. This long-term perspective allows UNICEF to (a) undertake actions in its regular country programmes that can contribute to the prevention of conflict and humanitarian crisis; (b) participate at country level in preparedness measures as a member of the resident coordinator's Disaster Management Team; and (c) support activities

to promote local capacity-building and rehabilitation - of the individual child, household, community or social service networks - as soon as possible in its humanitarian cooperation. (The emphasis placed on capacity development and rehabilitative action is illustrated in annex II of document E/ICEF/1997/7.) A premium is placed on (a) enabling the family - with particular attention to those households headed by women - to ensure the protection and security of the child; (b) encouraging community management of relief and rehabilitation; and (c) strengthening national government capacity to re-establish and upgrade essential social services.

5. In countries in which UNICEF maintains a presence before, during and after a humanitarian crisis, its activities can provide a bridge between preventive measures, humanitarian relief and rehabilitative activities in the post-crisis recovery phase. It can complement the action of other partners, for example, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which sees its role in countries of origin as one involving relatively short interventions, but which aim to have a lasting impact (see UNHCR document EC/46/SC/CRP.47 of 23 August 1996); WFP, which has a dual mandate of providing both relief and development (see WFP document WFP/EB.3/96/3 of 23 September 1996) and with which UNICEF can collaborate in rehabilitative activities to promote the transition from relief to development; and the United Nations Development Programme in preventive development and in post-crisis capacity-development, rehabilitation and recovery of national social infrastructures.

6. The lack of clear institutional responsibility for meeting the needs of internally displaced persons (IDPs) is the focus of the Inter-Agency Task Force on IDPs, in which UNICEF participates. Currently, UNICEF, like WFP, favours the designation of an operational lead agency on an ad hoc basis in each situation to manage needs assessments, coordinate support and services to IDPs, and lead negotiations with relevant authorities for the protection of and access to IDPs. As stated in document E/ICEF/1997/7, paragraphs 33-35, UNICEF and UNHCR foresee collaboration to develop programme guidelines for internally displaced children and women. UNICEF will systematize the extension of its child care and protection activities to the internally displaced and will ensure operational coordination of actions for IDPs when required and on a case-specific basis.

7. UNICEF is not primarily a relief agency and will provide non-food relief when required as a temporary measure. The development orientation of UNICEF is reflected in the allocation of its resources. In the period 1993-1995, over 73 per cent of its expenditures were allocated to regular country programmes and under 27 per cent to emergency activities. Within emergency expenditures, only a small percentage were allocated to pure non-food relief; over one half were allocated to health, nutrition, water and sanitation to ensure the survival and rehabilitation of vulnerable children and women. Education, to which UNICEF gives early priority in humanitarian emergencies, and community-based action for the protection and rehabilitation of children and women directly exposed to extreme violence were also given considerable emphasis. UNICEF humanitarian programmes are almost entirely funded through supplementary contributions, primarily though consolidated inter-agency appeals (CAPs).

II. INTER-AGENCY COORDINATION

8. UNICEF recognizes that no single humanitarian actor alone can respond to the comprehensive needs of children for care and protection; it is committed to partnership in order to achieve this goal. (UNICEF support for comprehensive coordination frameworks is outlined in E/ICEF/1997/7, paragraphs 17-22). UNICEF favours a proactive Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) mechanism. Communication can be more frequent between members of IASC, the primary mechanism for inter-agency coordination. In addition to its periodic meetings, UNICEF favours more frequent consultation between principals through telephone conferencing, especially for consideration of urgent matters such as rapid-onset humanitarian crises. UNICEF also supports the role of DHA particularly in strategic coordination at field level. UNICEF also continues to pursue the development of cooperative MOUs with other United Nations agencies as the basis for partnerships based on predictability and clarity of roles.

9. To be effective in its strategic coordination role, DHA needs to give the highest priority to consolidating its capacity for rapid mobilization. To facilitate this, it needs the support of its operational partners and their secondment of competent staff to DHA field operations. UNICEF is committed to strengthening this aspect of its support. Mobilization is also to be facilitated by rapid analysis of information generated through the Humanitarian Early Warning System (HEWS) and DHA's information exchange with partners. UNICEF anticipates full access to HEWS as part of a process of systematic exchange and analysis of information between the agencies. (The inter-agency linkages of the UNICEF Operations Centre are noted in E/ICEF/1997/7, paragraph 47.)

10. A central component of coordination is the management, analysis and exchange of information. UNICEF would like to see progress towards a DHA-coordinated system of monitoring of humanitarian programmes at field level and is working with the Sub-Working Group on Evaluation and Accountability set up by the Inter-Agency Task Force in this regard. A simple, standardized monitoring tool at field level will (a) facilitate information exchange, transparency and accountability; (b) enable DHA and its partners to issue rapid updates on progress or outstanding needs; and (c) facilitate reporting by agencies on their action and expenditures. UNICEF would also like to see the establishment of common communication systems at field level.

11. Like its main United Nations operational partners, UNICEF considers that the situation on the ground determines, in each complex emergency, the criteria for appointment of the Humanitarian Coordinator and for operational coordination arrangements. UNICEF considers that a strategic coordination role of an efficient DHA, unhampered by operational responsibilities, is generally desirable. In complex emergencies, coordination requires constant information exchange and follow-up between United Nations agencies, national counterparts, and bilateral and non-governmental partners, which can number in the hundreds, as well as with the political and peace-keeping wings of the United Nations. This is a full-time role if it is to be performed well. In each complex emergency, early agreement on the clear designation of operational lead agency roles by geographical zone or programme sector is a necessity, based on recognition of the mandate of each agency and its capacity on the ground.

12. In addition to the development of MOUs with United Nations partners as outlined in E/ICEF/1997/7, paragraph 20, UNICEF has two principal types of agreement with international partners, many of them with international non-governmental organizations. The first is a series of global stand-by agreements with organizations, networks or centres of excellence for the provision of technical expertise in a wide range of fields. Such agreements exist or are under negotiation with the Norwegian Refugee Council, the Disaster Relief Agency (Netherlands), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (United States), the Danish Refugee Council, the Swiss Disaster Relief, the Swedish Rescue Services Board, the Agency for Personnel Service Overseas (Ireland), the Overseas Development Administration (United Kingdom) and the International Executive Service Corps. Externally-available expertise covers such fields as radio communications, vehicle and equipment maintenance, warehousing and logistics, and a range of programme specializations in the fields of health, education, water supply, psycho-social health and trauma recovery, care of the unaccompanied children, child rights, conflict resolution and mediation.

13. Secondly, the organization encourages activity-specific agreements negotiated at country level by UNICEF representatives. For example, in Rwanda, such agreements were drawn up with several agencies, including the Italian NGOs Associazione Volontari Per il Servizio Internazionale and Collegio Universaterio Aspiranti e Medici Missionari, Save the Children Fund (SCF) (United Kingdom) and SCF (United States), for collaboration to help assist unaccompanied children. UNICEF has recently updated its prototype NGO agreement which sets clear parameters in many of the same fields as noted in paragraph 12 above.

14. In line with the priority accorded to capacity development, UNICEF will increasingly pursue partnerships with organizations, professional networks and centres of excellence in regions experiencing complex emergencies to promote intraregional and south-south cooperation in humanitarian action for children.

15. Within the DHA-coordinated Inter-Agency Sub-Working Group on Resource Mobilization, UNICEF supports the initiatives under consideration to streamline the consolidated appeals mechanism, which, including flash appeals, have to be issued in a timely fashion. The recognition by UNICEF of the need to ensure strategic direction and prioritization in CAP documents and, in parallel, to improve its own management of programmes, budgets and reporting to donors, is outlined in paragraph 53 of E/ICEF/1997/7.

III. INTERNAL EFFICIENCIES

16. Chapter IV of E/ICEF/1997/7 provides a comprehensive summary of action under way within UNICEF to strengthen its operational, financial and human resources capacity to act appropriately and effectively, backed by increasingly efficient administrative procedures to facilitate a rapid and flexible response to humanitarian crises.

17. UNICEF is already a highly decentralized organization, with considerable authority delegated to the country representative. None the less, as part of the ongoing organizational reform that foresees the further devolution of responsibilities to the field, UNICEF is reviewing and streamlining decision-making procedures related to the definition of and response to

emergencies in order to clarify lines of authority, accountability and communication between country, regional and headquarters locations (see E/ICEF/1997/7, paragraph 49). Within the inter-agency review process, UNICEF continues to support the principle of maximum delegation of authority and responsibility to field level.

IV. CONCLUSION

18. The present report has emphasized that the child-centred mandate and long-term orientation of UNICEF complements the roles of other partners in humanitarian action. UNICEF will continue to pursue closer cooperation with its United Nations partners and to consolidate MOUs and partnership agreements with organizations and centres of excellence in both southern and northern hemispheres. UNICEF will continue to work with partners in the field and through the IASC Working Group, the Inter-Agency Task Force on the Economic and Social Council and its related working groups to ensure that cooperative humanitarian action is based on complementarity, predictability and clear division of labour.